

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE EXCHANGE AND TELECONFERENCING

5 CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a non-provisional application of provisional application

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10 BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to wireless networks and, more particularly, to a methodology and a concomitant system whereby a short message
15 service exchange effects value-added functionality, including teleconferencing, based on the contents of a short message.

2. Description of the Background Art

A Short Message Service (SMS) enables a mobile subscriber in a mobile
20 wireless network to send and receive short alphanumeric messages through his/her mobile station. The mobile station in the modern wireless networks can be a cellular phone, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a laptop or any portable device capable of communicating with the wireless network equipment and having an alphanumeric display. With the advent of integration of some of the functionalities of wireless
25 communication services with the Internet, it is also possible to send and receive short messages from a fixed communication station such as an Internet-connected computer.

A high-level block representation of a conventional SMS communication system **100** is shown in FIG. 1. A short message (SM) can originate from a wireless device such as a cell phone **120**, a computer **105** connected to the Internet **110**, or any similar device. A SM originating from a wireless device **120** is received by a Mobile

5 Switching Center (MSC) **115** via the wireless medium **121** and other entities such as a base station not shown in the figure for simplicity. The MSC then sends the SM to the applicable SMSC (Short Message Service Center) **135** through the network cloud **130** comprising PSTN, wireless cellular, and other specific networks such as the well-known signaling system 7 (SS7) or even proprietary networks. SMSC **135** then determines the

10 destination of the SM (in this example, mobile station **145**), and routes it to the appropriate MSC **140**, which then delivers the SM to the destination device **145**. While two distinct MSCs are shown in FIG. 1 for generality, in cases where the destination device is in the same area as the SM originating device, the SM is handled by a single MSC. Similarly, it is also clear that computer **105** connected to the Internet **110** can

15 transmit the SM to SMSC **135** for handling as outlined above for delivery to mobile station **145**. Moreover, the above description of a conventional SMS system is highly simplified to bring out the underlying processes. However, even in the simplified form, it is readily appreciated that in current SMS systems the SM is just delivered to the destination device in the same form it is sent from the originating device. But, with

20 further reflection, it is soon realized that there exists a great potential for using SMs in a SMS system to initiate different operations based on the contents of the SMs. Also, an SM can be preprocessed and valuable information may be added before delivery to the final recipient. These features are not utilized in the state-of-the-art SMS systems.

Furthermore, SMSs can be used to initiate specific operations at the destination. Keeping this in view, the subject matter of the present invention relates to an SMS exchange that performs value-addition functions based on the contents of SMSs.

5 Another aspect of the subject matter of the present invention relates to initiating a teleconference from a cell-phone through the SMS exchange utilizing the value-added functionality of SMSs. Teleconferencing among three or more individuals with cellular phones is a very useful communication service in the today's environment. People on the move are greatly helped by such a service in making decisions and
10 planning future activities. However, in the current state-of-the-art, a person initiating a teleconference or, e.g., that person's secretary, is required to call each of the participants and conduct the teleconference. There is now a need for an automated system that can manage a teleconference without the intervention of the person initiating the teleconference. Also, other automated functions such as reminding a user about some
15 event or providing the user with some information at a time pre-selected by the user are possible with such a telecommunication service. A major benefit of such a system is that a user can coordinate activities such as teleconferencing, tele-reminding or timed tele-messaging even when the user is on the move without physical access to a computer with connection to the Internet.

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Discussed below are representative references that provide a backdrop for the subject matter of the present invention. The SMS exchange with value-addition

features and the SMS-based teleconferencing system in accordance with the present invention are not taught or suggested by this art.

US Patent Application No. 20010003094 by Foll describes a method and
5 mobile communications system for controlling a short message service. In this invention,
on the basis of the fact that short messages are sent by a communication terminal of a
mobile subscriber into a mobile radio network and are routed to a switching facility
responsible for the mobile subscriber, a short message together with an address that
identifies a service facility responsible for dealing with the short message service for a
10 mobile subscriber is received by the switching facility. The short messages are routed for
temporary storage in the service facility and for transmission to a communication
terminal of another subscriber if the received address is contained in an address table of
the switching facility.

15 US Patent Application No. 20010011020 by Nahm pertains to a method
for transferring and reflecting message by using short message service in a portable
digital phone. In this invention, a method for operating an SMS in a portable digital
phone, more particularly a method for transferring and responding to a message using an
SMS in a portable digital phone, is described. The method according to the invention
20 includes the steps of drafting a message with a plurality of optional messages by a
sending party, transferring the optional messages as an SMS message during a
transferring mode, and receiving and responding to the sender's message by selectively
responding to the optional messages.

US Patent No. 6,263,212 issued to Ross et al. describes a short message service center. The short message service center allows processing characteristics to be modified for service users within a given type so that the storage and delivery of short messages to one service user of a given type may be different for another service user within the same given type. The short message service center alleviates some of the potential "jams" associated with the processing of large distribution lists and closed user groups. The short message service center further allows for distributed administration. Additionally, the short message service center receives a short message in one standard format and delivers the short message in another standard format. The short message service center utilizes both a table routing method and a global title translation method for routing messages to a recipient. It allows a complete transmission of short messages between service entities having differing short message length definitions and has capability for dynamic system re-configuration.

US Patent No. 5,903,726 issued to Donovan et al. describes a system using portion of a short message payload to identify short message service types and delivering the message if user subscribes to the services. A system and method for providing enhanced short-message service options in PCS systems is described. The generic short-message service is split into unbundled short-message service applications (e.g., emergency messaging, voice mail alert, etc.). Each of these unbundled short message services is recognized at short-message systems, home location registers, and subscriber terminals.

US Patent No. 5,787,357 issued to Salin pertains short message processing in a mobile exchange. In this invention, a method is described for processing a short message received at a mobile exchange in a cellular radio network, for delivering
5 one short message at a time to a B subscriber. An operation controller is used for observing the operation of the B subscriber so as to detect the delivery of the short message and to prevent the delivery of another short message when the delivery of the preceding short message is in progress. A memory is used for storing rejected short messages and a queue control is adopted responsive to the B-subscriber operation
10 controller for reading the rejected short message from the memory so as to initiate the delivery of the short message to the B subscriber when the delivery of the preceding short message is completed.

US Patent No. 5,577,103 issued to Foti describes a method of providing
15 service information from a subscriber service profile to subscribers in a cellular telecommunications network using the short message service. The network includes a mobile station having a visual display, a mobile switching center, and a home location register for storing the subscriber service profile. A request for the service profile information is transmitted from the mobile station to the mobile switching center and the
20 home location register. The mobile switching center retrieves the service profile information from the home location register. The service profile information is appended to an SMS message that is transmitted from the mobile switching center to the mobile station. The service profile information is then provided in a voice message or displayed

on the visual display of the mobile station. Thus, this invention provides only basic additional processing of an SMS message before delivery to the final recipient.

While the above representative art deals with various aspects of SMS message systems, the art is devoid of a separate SMS exchange with value-addition capability in accordance with the present invention. Moreover, the art is devoid of value addition service involving initiation of a teleconferencing system by using SMS messages such as described herein.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

These shortcomings and other limitations and deficiencies are obviated in accordance with the present invention by a method, and concomitant circuitry, to implement short message value-added services.

In accordance with one broad method aspect of the present invention, a method for processing a short message service (SMS) message includes: (a) embedding a value-added field in the SMS message by the originator of the SMS message, the field being indicative of a value-added service requested by the originator, and (b) implementing the value-added service based upon the SMS message.

In accordance with yet another broad method aspect of the present invention, a method for establishing a teleconference via a short message service (SMS) message includes: (a) embedding a teleconference directive in the SMS message by the

initiator of the teleconference, and (b) implementing the value-added service based upon the teleconference directive.

Broad system aspects of the present invention are commensurate with the
5 aforementioned broad method aspects.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The teachings of the present invention can be readily understood by
considering the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying
10 drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a high-level block diagram of a wireless system used to describe a
conventional short message service involving mobile devices such as a cell-phone;

FIG. 2 is a high-level block diagram of a short message service system wherein a
short message service exchange in accordance with the present invention is shown in
15 overlay fashion on the system of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a high-level block diagram depicting the components of the short
message service exchange of FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a flow chart depicting the processing to deliver a short message for
implementing value-added functionality;

20 FIG. 5 depicts the layout of a data packet for an exemplary short message wherein
keywords are replaced by actual data for a given originator/member;

FIG. 6A depicts the raw text of the data packet of FIG. 5 in top-down fashion;

FIG. 6B depicts the conversion of the raw text of FIG. 6A into the Extensible Markup Language (XML) format wherein data items are tagged by customized XML tags;

FIG. 6C depicts another example of the raw text of a data packet which contains data to invoke a teleconference;

FIG. 6D depicts the conversion of the raw text of FIG. 6C into XML format;

FIG. 7 depicts components of the SMS data storage device of FIG. 3;

FIG. 8 depicts exemplary records in the member database of FIG. 7;

FIG. 9 depicts exemplary records in the SM delivery database of FIG. 7

FIG. 10 depicts an illustrative embodiment of an SMS-based teleconference system in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 11 depicts in high-level block diagram form the teleconference server of FIG. 10, including a processor and memory;

FIG. 12 illustrates the layout of the member database of the memory in FIG. 11;

FIG. 13 illustrates the layout of the session database of the memory in FIG. 11;

FIG. 14 illustrates the composition of the proceedings database of the memory shown in FIG. 11;

FIG. 15 is a flow diagram for the process of establishing and taking down of a teleconference; and

Fig. 16 illustrates the Web page format for requesting a teleconference.

To facilitate understanding, identical reference numerals have been used, where possible, to designate identical elements that are common to the figures.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A high-level circuit block diagram of SMS system **200** for an embodiment in accordance with the present invention is shown in FIG. 2 wherein an SMS exchange performs value-addition to SMs in addition to normal routing and sending of SMs; FIG. 2 is a modified depiction of FIG. 1 wherein SMS exchange **205** is shown in overlay fashion on the components of FIG. 1. In system **200**, all SMs pass through the SMS exchange **205** before reaching their respective destinations. The different components of the SMS exchange **205** are shown in FIG. 3 (to be discussed shortly in conjunction with FIG. 4). Each of these components may be implemented on one or more separate computers or may be integrated on a single computer depending on the desired SMS rate handling capacity. A flowchart showing the steps in delivering an SM is shown in FIG. 4, and includes the following processes:

Process 405: An SM is originated, for example, in SMS system **200** by computer **105** or wireless device **120**. If the SM is sent from a computer **105**, it is sent to the IP (Internet Protocol) address of the SMS exchange **205** via link **207**. In case the SM is sent from a wireless device such as cell-phone **120**, it is directed to the phone number that corresponds to the SMS exchange **205** via phone line **206**. An exemplary message sent from computer **105** to the Internet e-mail address SMdest@isp.com may be of the form “send quote to <myemail> and call me on <myphone>”. The value-added service corresponding to this message is the replacement of the alias names between the delimiters ‘<’ and ‘>’, namely, ‘myemail’ and ‘myphone’, with the actual e-mail address and phone number of the originator.

Process 410: In the case of the SM originating from an Internet connected device **105**, the SM directly arrives at the SMS exchange via the Internet **110** over link **207**. But, an SM originating from a wireless device **120** first arrives at an SMSC **135** via an MSC **115**.

- 5 The SMSC **135** forwards the SM to an SMS exchange **205**. An SM thus arrives at the SMS exchange **205** via a communication network such as the Internet **110**, or a network 'cloud' **130** comprising PSTN, wireless cellular networks or other networks. In either case, the SM arriving at the SMS exchange is encapsulated within a data packet.

- 10 A data packet corresponding to the aforementioned exemplary message is shown in FIG. 5. As is typical, the IP layer packet **500** has header information such as IP source (**505**), IP destination (**510**), member field (**515**), and so forth, as well as a data payload field (**520**). The utility of the member field will be discussed below.

- 15 Process 415: In the SMS exchange **205**, the SMS gateway **300** of FIG. 3 extracts the contents of the SM from the different formats in which they arrive. For instance, an SM received via the Internet will usually be in the form of IP (Internet Protocol) packets. The extracted SM is then sent to an SMS format converter **305**. The raw SM is generally in alphanumeric text form along with other information pertaining to the source and
- 20 destination. The SMS format converter **305** transforms the contents of the SM into a format suitable for efficient processing by the SMS processor **310**. An example of such a format in the current state of the art is the XML (Extensible Markup Language) format.

With XML, customized tags and other overlay data are added to the raw SM contents to enable value addition functions to be performed efficiently.

As one example, a simplified format of IP packet **600** including an SMS message as data portion **605** is shown in FIG. 6A, which depicts the contents of FIG. 5 in a top-down manner. The raw ASCII text in the IP packet is converted into an XML format as shown in FIG. 6B. As seen here, data items are tagged by customized XML tags such as <KEYWORD> and </KEYWORD>. The processing of the SM contents by the inclusion of such tags becomes easier for other functional entities in the system.

As another example, a simplified format of IP packet **610** including an SMS message as data portion **615** is shown in FIG. 6C, which depicts a packet that may be used to set-up a teleconference (the details of teleconferencing will be discussed in the sequel). The raw ASCII text in the IP packet is converted into an XML format as shown in FIG. 6D. As seen here, each data item is tagged by customized XML tags such as <DAY> and </DAY>.

The SM in XML format is then passed on to the SMS processor **310**.

Process 420: SMS processor **310** stores the source, destination and other relevant information for each message in the SMS data storage **315**. Based on the destination information, SMS processor **310** adds routing information required for routing the SM as per a selected routing policy -- such routing policies are conventional and as such are not

encompassed by the present invention. For example, a least cost routing may be used to send the SM to optimize the communication costs, whereas a least time to deliver policy sends the SM along fast routes to minimize the total delivery time for urgent messages.

SMS processor **310** accesses any information required for routing from the SMS Data

- 5 Storage **315**. The SMS processor **310** then sends the SM to the Value-Addition Processor (VAP) **320**.

Process 425: The VAP **320** performs value addition functions on the SM based on the stored programs in its memory and the data in the SMS data storage **315**. For instance, a
10 user may instruct through his SM that his contact email be sent to the recipient of the SM by just typing the keyword 'myemail' in his SM, as exemplified by the data payload **520** in FIG. 5. Such keywords may be distinguished from regular text in the message by enclosing them in delimiters such as the ASCII characters '<' and '>'. Alternatively, for ease of composing an SM while sending from a cell-phone, a character such as 'K' may
15 precede a key word. Thus, 'K myemail' would mean that 'myemail' is a keyword. Yet another alternative is to define a set of keywords that cannot be used in the normal text of an SM. The VAP then looks up that user's data, based upon the Member ID (**515**) in the SMS data storage **315** and inserts the user's full email address in place of the keyword 'myemail'. Similarly, a variety of value addition functions could be defined to perform
20 value addition services based on different product definitions and policies specified in the SMS exchange system.

It is noted that there may be different product definitions within a given service type, and several policies could be defined for use under a given product definition. For example, under a service type called 'SMS initiated teleconferencing' (expanded upon later), one product P1 may be defined as teleconferencing with the maximum number of members limited to 5. Yet another product P2 may be restricted to members with cellular phones only. Further, under product P1, a policy may involve permitting members to join a teleconference within certain duration from the start of the teleconference, and yet another policy may allow members to join a teleconference at any time. The choice of a product and a policy will appropriately determine the cost for the service.

After fully processing the SM, VAP **320** then returns the SM to SMS processor **310**.

Process 430: SMS processor **310** then records the completion of value-addition function and any identifiers required for costing and fee calculation for each SM or rating based on pre-defined SMS delivery plans. The SM is then sent to the SMSC gateway **325**.

Process 435: SMSC gateway **325** converts the SM in XML format into formats suitable for sending them to standard state-of-the-art entities such as SMSC **135** or SMSC **136**, as per well-known communication protocols. For instance, a common protocol used to communicate with a SMSC is the SMPP (Short Message Peer to Peer) protocol (see, for example, <http://smsforum.net/doc/public/FAQ/GenFAQ.html>). The SM is sent to SMSC

136 which has been chosen by the SMS exchange based on service agreements in force and SM routing algorithms used in the system.

Process 440: From SMSC **136**, the SM is then delivered to the final recipient **145** via

5 MSC **140** following the standard routing process.

Process 445: After successful delivery of an SM, a delivery notification message flows back to the SMS exchange **205** via MSC **140**, SMSC **136**, and SMSC gateway **325**. The SMS processor **310** in the SMS exchange **205** then updates the database record for the
10 SM with the delivery notification details in SMS data storage **315**.

Referring next to FIG. 7, a diagrammatic representation of an embodiment of SMS Data Storage **315** is shown. Data storage **315** is a memory that typically includes one or more machine-readable media. Such media include, as is well-known in the art, an
15 appropriate combination of magnetic, semiconductor and optical media. Memory is preferably capable of supporting searching and storing of digital multimedia data such as text and audio. Memory (or portions thereof) may reside on single computer, or may be distributed in a known manner among multiple computers.

20 In the present embodiment, data storage **315** includes member database **700**, SM delivery database **705**, routing data **710**, and other service dependent data **715**.

The rows and columns of the databases described herein represent records and fields thereof, respectively. In the described embodiments, the databases are used in a relational arrangement, as is well-known in the art, so that the databases relate to one another by way of fields that store common data. It is to be noted that while the following description refers to specific individual databases, formats, records, and fields, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that various modifications and substitutions may be made thereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

Referring now to FIG. 8, an embodiment of member database **700** is depicted. Database **700** stores data relating to member accounts that are maintained for account holders. Each record (row) of database **700** represents such an account. For exemplary purposes, two records R1 and R2 are shown.

Field **810** stores a member identifier that is associated with and that uniquely identifies a member account. In this embodiment, the member identifier is a four-digit member number. The number of digits in this field can be fixed depending on the maximum expected number of members in any SMS system. Other types of account identifiers with alphanumeric characters may be used if required. Field **815** is used to store the name of a member. In one embodiment, the name stored in field **815** is a digital audio file (or a pointer thereto) that contains a pre-recorded audio sample of the account holder's name. The audio recording of member names may be played back while interacting with users with telephone or other voice playback instruments. Field **820** stores the profile information of a member such as phone number and email address of

the member. It is possible to store multiple possible phone numbers and emails here, and also other profile information not shown here. While sending SMs from devices other than a wireless phone a member is required to login using a password. Field **825** stores the member's password that is used to authenticate the use of the SMS system by the member.

Referring next to Fig. 9, an embodiment of SM Delivery database **705** is depicted in detail. Database **705** stores data relating to SMs processed through the SMS exchange. One record (row) of database **705** is maintained for each SM. For exemplary purposes, three records R3.1, R3.2 and R4 are shown. Field **910** stores an SM identifier that uniquely identifies an SM. For exemplary purposes, the SM identifier is shown as including six digits. Field **915** stores the identifier of the member who has sent the SM. Field **920** is used to store SM origination information that can be either a wireless phone number or the IP (Internet Protocol) address of the computer from which the SM has been sent. Similarly, field **925** stores the destination information for an SM, which can be a wireless phone number or an IP address. Field **930** stores the actual SMs in the form they were received. For simplicity in representation, only the ASCII characters of some sample SMS messages or parts of messages are shown in FIG. 9. Alternatively, pointers to SMs stored elsewhere in memory can be stored in field **930** (not exemplified). Field **935** stores a value-addition service code that indicates the type of value-addition function performed on an SM. The value-addition service code is useful for determining the charge incurred by a user in sending an SM. Different rating schemes can be applied while charging the SM senders based on different service plans to which the users can

subscribe. Field **940** indicates the delivery status for an SM. The delivery status could indicate information about an SM delivery such as 'Delivered', 'Pending', or 'Cannot deliver'. This information can be made available to a sender of an SM at his/her mobile phone or computer.

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With reference again to FIG. 7, routing data **710** contains information about the different SMSC gateways and SMSCs and their connectivity data. As mentioned earlier, different services connected with SMS can be supported by the SMS system described herein. Relevant data required to support such services is represented in this embodiment as service dependent data **715**. The contents of data **715** will be discussed in more detail below with respect to the teleconference service

Teleconference

Another preferred embodiment of this invention includes a system and method for establishing, maintaining, and taking down a teleconference among three or more individuals by using an SMS exchange. A schematic representation of SMS-based teleconferencing system **1000** is shown in FIG. 10. In this system, each participant has a telephone (wireless or wireline) and the person initiating the teleconference has a wireless cellular phone exemplified by phone **1015** capable of sending SMS messages via MSC **1020**. Alternatively, a teleconference could also be initiated from computer **1025** connected to Internet **1030**. Registered members only can initiate a teleconference. It may be noted that while a conventional wireline/landline telephone **1055** cannot be used

to initiate a teleconference as it does not have SMS sending capability, it can still be included in a teleconference for voice based communication.

Teleconference site **1001** with teleconference server **1005** is linked to
5 PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) and wireless cellular networks **1035** via
landline connections **1036** and Internet **1030** via link **1031**. Teleconferencing is made
possible through teleconferencing bridge **1010** at teleconference site **1001**.

Teleconference server **1005** is interfaced to teleconferencing bridge **1010** for coordination
of teleconferencing functions in the system. SMS messages indicating details of a

10 teleconference are sent from SMSC **1045** to SMS exchange **1050**, which is interfaced to
teleconference server **1005**, via networks **1035** or Internet **1030**. It is assumed here that
SMS exchange **1050** and teleconference server **1005** are geographically local to each
other and so the communication between them also takes place over a geographically
local interface **1002**. However, SMS exchange **1050** and teleconference server **1005** may

15 be located in different geographical locations and in that case, the communication
between them would be through Internet **1030** or other networks **1035**. Teleconferencing
bridge **1010** is implemented utilizing any of a plurality of well-known state-of-the-art
telephony switches such as, for example, the SwitchMaster™ bridge, a voice and data
telephone switch manufactured by CadCom Telesystems, Inc. of Enid, Oklahoma. It is to

20 be noted that the system shown in FIG. 10 may include well-known internal connectors,
architectures, interfaces, ports, and communication devices (e.g., modems) to enable
processing and communication. For the purpose of focusing on the inventive subject
matter, a detailed description of the same is omitted.

Referring next to FIG. 11, a diagrammatic representation of an embodiment of teleconference server **1005** is shown. Server **1005** typically includes memory **1105**, and at least one processor **1100** in communication therewith. Processor **1100** is interfaced to SMS exchange **1050** via connection **1002** to receive SMS messages sent by an initiator of a teleconference. PSTN telephone lines **1036** are interfaced to processor **1100** through a standard PSTN interface. Processor **1100** also controls the switching and other functions of a teleconferencing bridge. It must be noted that the processor **1100** is interfaced to the SMS exchange **1050**, PSTN **1035**, and teleconferencing bridge **1010** through appropriate state-of-the-art interfaces, which are not shown in FIG. 9 to again focus on the inventive aspects of the subject matter.

Memory **1105** typically includes one or more machine-readable media. Such media include, as is well known in the art, an appropriate combination of magnetic, semiconductor and optical media. Memory is preferably capable of supporting searching and storing of digital multimedia data such as text and audio. Memory (or portions thereof) may reside on single computer, or may be distributed in a known manner among multiple computers.

In the present embodiment, memory **1105** includes member database **1110**, session database **1115**, proceedings database **1120** and audio storage **1125**. Memory also stores program **1130**, which includes instructions for controlling processor **1110** in accordance with the present invention.

The rows and columns of the databases described herein represent records and fields thereof, respectively. In the described embodiments, the databases are used in a relational arrangement, as is known in the art, so that the databases relate to one another by way of fields that store common data. It is to be noted that while the following
5 description refers to specific individual databases, formats, records, and fields, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that various modifications and substitutions may be made thereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

Referring now to FIG. 12, an embodiment of member database **1110** is depicted
10 in detail. Database **1110** stores data relating to member accounts that are maintained for account holders. Each record (row) of database **1110** represents such an account. For exemplary purposes, two records R5 and R6 are shown.

Field **1210** stores a member identifier that is associated with and that
15 uniquely identifies a member account. In this embodiment, the member identifier is a four-digit member number. The number of digits in this field can be fixed depending on the maximum expected number of members in any teleconferencing system. Other types of account identifiers with alphanumeric characters may be used if required. Field **1220** is used to store the name of a member. In one embodiment, the name stored in field **1220**
20 is a digital audio file (or a pointer thereto) that contains a pre-recorded audio sample of the account holder's name. The audio recording of member names may be played back while interacting with users with telephone or other voice playback instruments. Field **1230** stores the phone number of the member. It is possible to store multiple possible

phone numbers here.

Referring next to FIG. 13, an embodiment of session database **1115** is depicted in detail. Database **1115** stores data relating to one or more sessions. One record (row) of database **1115** is maintained for each session. For exemplary purposes, two records R7 and R8 are shown. Field **1310** stores a session identifier that uniquely identifies a session. For exemplary purposes, the session identifier is shown as including six digits. Field **1320** is used to store chairperson identifier that identifies a particular chairperson of a teleconference session. Field **1330** stores a credit card number of the chairperson. In this embodiment, a chairperson uses the credit card number to pay the costs associated with a teleconference session. However, in practice, other well-known payment means may be adopted. Field **1340** stores the duration of a teleconference and field **1350** stores the identification of participants of a teleconference in terms of their member numbers or telephone numbers.

Referring next to FIG. 14, an embodiment of proceedings database **1120** is depicted in detail. Database **1120** stores data that points to audio stream files. For exemplary purposes, two records R9 and R10 are shown. Field **1410** stores a session identifier that uniquely identifies a session. Field **1420** stores a pointer to the audio stream file that can be used to play back audio proceedings of a teleconference. In this embodiment, the identifier stored in field **1420** is a directory path in the audio storage **1125** in memory **1105**. The audio storage space **1125** is a large block of free area where audio recordings of a teleconference can be stored. Authorized members of a

teleconference system can later retrieve the stored audio recordings of the teleconference.

Teleconference Initiation and Dissolution

FIG. 15 shows flowchart **1500** of teleconference initiation and dissolution

5 process, including the following processes:

Process 1505: A teleconference is initiated and scheduled by a member by sending an SMS message to SMS exchange **1050** giving the necessary details about the teleconference. A typical SMS message has already been alluded to with respect to FIGS.

10 6C and 6D. Basically, the SMS message contains date, time, and duration of a teleconference, contact details of the participants and information for charging the cost of the teleconference. The SMS message shown in FIG. 6D is just an example format with abbreviated keywords that refer to a teleconferencing function. The abbreviations shown are: TC-TeleConference, DT-Date, T-Time, DR-Duration, CP-ChairPerson, M-Member,
15 P-Phone number, and CC-Credit Card. However, while sending a teleconference initiation request from a computer, another more compatible user interface may be provided. For example, web page with a suitable format such as template **1600** shown in FIG. 16 may be used.

20 A member who conducts the teleconference is designated as the chairperson. A chairperson is accountable for call and other charges with reference to a teleconference conducted by him/her. The teleconference charges typically include the

telephone call charges of all the participants, Internet connection charges, SMS processing fees and charges for usage of teleconference server and associated equipment.

Process 1510: SMS exchange **1050** processes the SMS message and checks whether all the information necessary for scheduling a teleconference is provided in the message, and whether sufficient resources in the teleconference bridge would be available for the duration of the teleconference. It also authenticates the chairperson's identity through member database **1110** and checks the validity of the credit card information. Any missing information is communicated to the teleconference initiator via an SMS message or Internet message in case of teleconference initiation through an Internet connected computer. After ascertaining that the teleconference can be scheduled, the SMS exchange sends a confirmation message to the teleconference initiator.

Process 1515: SMS processor **1100** then appends information such as telephone numbers of members identified by their member identifiers and credit card number to the SMS message for enabling the scheduling of the teleconference by the teleconference server **1005**.

Process 1520: SMS **1050** exchange sends the processed SMS message to the teleconference server **1005**.

Process 1525: At the scheduled time of a teleconference, the teleconference server **1005** calls up the chairperson's phone (e.g., **1015**) first and indicates the starts of the

teleconference. The other participants' phones (e.g., **1055**, **1065**, **1066**) are then called up separately. It may be noted that the calls from the teleconference server reach the participants via PSTN and/or appropriate MSCs (e.g., **1020**, **1070**). Calls of the responding participants are then bridged at the teleconferencing bridge. It is possible to repeat calling non-responding participants at periodic intervals for the duration of the conference to connect them in the middle of a teleconference.

Process 1530: Teleconferencing among the called-in participants progresses with their calls linked through the teleconferencing bridge. During the course of a teleconference, it is possible for the chairperson or other authorized persons to send SMS messages to SMS exchange **1050** for performing specific value-addition services. For example, a chairperson may send an SMS message to call up one or more new members for inclusion in the teleconference. On completion of the teleconference, the chairperson hangs up his/her connection signaling the end of teleconference.

Process 1535: The teleconference server disconnects the telephone connections from the teleconferencing bridge **1010** and performs billing and settlement functions.

Other Embodiments

As mentioned earlier, timed tele-messaging is yet another example of value-addition service that can be supported by SMS exchange **205** or **1050**. A user can send an SM to the SMS exchange instructing the system to send a message incorporated in the SM at a specific time as a new SM to him/her or to another party. The SMS

exchange then sends the message contained in the SM to the destination at the specified time.

Although the embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described in detail herein, those skilled in the art can readily devise many other varied embodiments that still incorporate these teachings. Thus, the previous description merely illustrates the principles of the invention. It will thus be appreciated that those with ordinary skill in the art will be able to devise various arrangements, which although not explicitly described or shown herein, embody principles of the invention and are included within its spirit and scope. Furthermore, all examples and conditional language recited herein are principally intended expressly to be only for pedagogical purposes to aid the reader in understanding the principles of the invention and the concepts contributed by the inventors to furthering the art, and are to be construed as being without limitation to such specifically recited examples and conditions. Moreover, all statements herein reciting principles, aspects, and embodiments of the invention, as well as specific examples thereof, are intended to encompass both structural and functional equivalents thereof. Additionally, it is intended that such equivalents include both currently known equivalents as well as equivalents developed in the future, that is, any elements developed that perform the function, regardless of structure.

In addition, it will be appreciated by those with ordinary skill in the art that the block diagrams herein represent conceptual views of illustrative circuitry, equipment, and systems embodying the principles of the invention.